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AUTHOR Gamble, Teri Kwal; Gamble, Michael W.
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ABSTRACT

Since imaginary awareness--as the core of the oral interpreter's art--must be preceded by both an awareness of internal events and an awareness of external events, awareness training can be the most effective means of helping interpreters develop their art. Two models of the awareness development process, a hierarchy of response levels and a mind-sense-body cycle, provide instructors with useful teaching strategies. Once students have developed an alert sensory apparatus and a responsive body, they are ready to experience literature and then to interpret it orally for others. (JM)

Teri Kwal Gamble
Michael W. Gamble

"Awareness Training and the Oral Interpreter"

(by Teri Kwal Gamble and Michael W. Gamble)

One major goal of a course in oral interpretation is to expand a student's insights and refine his perception. For this reason, awareness training should play a major role in an oral interpreter's conditioning. It is, after all, a developed awareness that allows things to affect man permitting him to be sensitive to stimuli, and enabling him to feel.

The Concept of Awareness

Recently some attention has been focused on the concept of awareness and the need we have to develop the sensory perception and to sharpen the sensory "antennae" of our students.[1] However, even a cursory examination of standard oral interpretation references reveals that these sources are still greatly deficient in explaining either the whys or the ways that this objective may be realized. Awareness training for the oral interpreter has all but been ignored by basic textbooks in the field. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to explore a rationale for incorporating awareness development into an oral interpreter's training. A student of interpretation should be encouraged to store what he discovers during this initial phase of his study in his silo of experience: the fuller each student's silo becomes the easier it will be for him to apply his understanding to subsequent performance situations. Just as an actor's training today rarely begins with scene study, neither should an

oral reader's training begin with literature. Just as it is considered perfectly normal and necessary for the musician to warm-up by playing scales before tackling complex works, so should it be considered normal and necessary for the interpreter to warm-up before tackling difficult selections. The interpretation of literature is considered here as the culmination of the interpretive artist's work and training, not the beginning. Thus, interpretation practicioners may effectively borrow from what those in the acting and music professions have already realized, and may gain by applying their practices to interpreter preparation.

In order to be an effective reader the oral interpreter needs to develop three basic types of awareness: an awareness of external events, an awareness of internal events, and an awareness of imaginary events. Work in external awareness will help the student to develop an appreciation of the fact that he is a multisensory creature who is continually making contact with a surrounding evnironment. Work in internal awareness will function to stimulate the student's interior channels so that he will be able to process this awakened external sensitivity through his own physical and psychic being. As an interpreter he will be urged to develop an acute perception of how the outside world affects him, including how his actual sensory contacts with the surrounding environment make him feel cognitively, emotionally, and physically. These two basic types of knowledge are then joined to allow him to

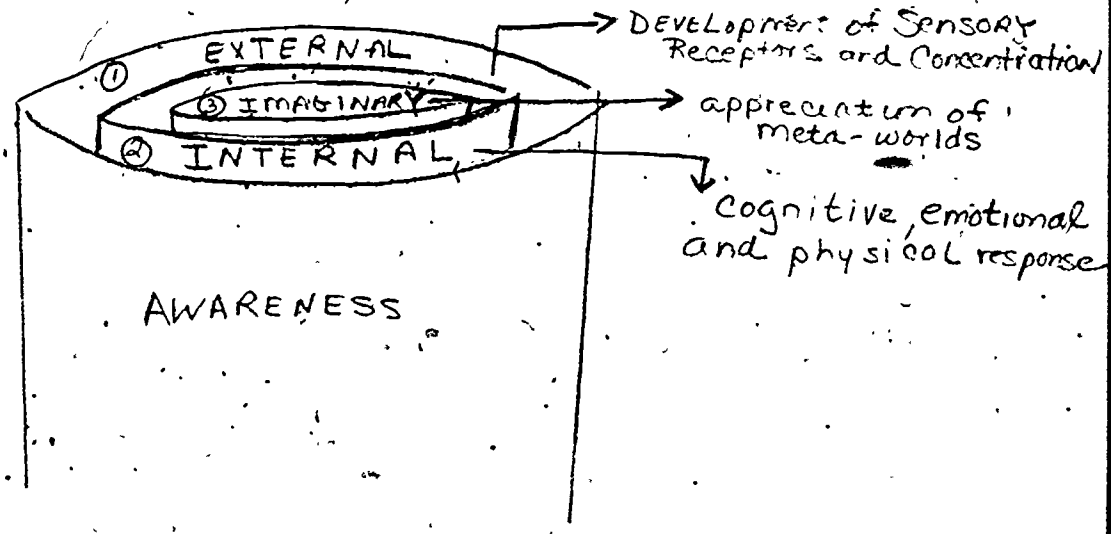
achieve the core of his art--imaginary awareness. A fully developed imaginary awareness means that the interpreter has mastered the techniques which will permit him to perceive the "metaworlds" of literature.[2] This theory is supported by the fact that "the sensory apparatus mediates between the more internal ongoing activities of the organism and the events outside it."[3] Thus, as Bacon believes, the reader is, in reality, an environment in which a piece of literature is placed, and from which it must draw the energies that give it life.[4] In effect, we are suggesting that the instructor must work with the student in order to perfect this environment.

The instructor can help prepare an interpreter by working to extend his appreciation beyond the actual, beyond the here and now. He can train and ready the student by seriously working to develop in him an awareness of imagined images and imagined objects; in this way the student becomes conscious of the fact that sensory stimuli need not be present to affect him; he will realize that the realm of fictive creation is also rich in sensory appeals. Once the instructor accomplishes this, the student will then be able to open himself to imaginary experience. He will then be in an excellent position to receive, process and interpret literature.

A Working Model of Awareness

The model describes what we believe to be the three main foci of the developing interpreter. As can be seen the three Awareness Layers overlap each other so that growth in one area

stimulates growth in another area. By concentrating and working on each succeeding layer, the interpreter will be able to capture the vital principle of his art--or what we have termed imaginary awareness.



As noted by Post, it is up to the teacher to move the student closer to the artist by increasing the range, the delicacy, and the connections the student is able to make between the different elements of his experience.[5] It is up to the instructor to find or create experiences that will function catalystically and precipitate student performance abilities. The teaching strategy we call for provides for this.

A Hierarchy of Response Levels

Ultimately the "metaworld" of literature will be the world to which the interpreter responds; we contend, however, that he must first be able to respond to the world in which he lives. Before the student is asked to take the time to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, move and feel as the words of an author direct, he must first be able to see, hear, taste, smell, touch, move and feel in the real world. If the student is to

develop the power to elicit imagined sensory perceptions in his audience, he must first be able to evoke sensory perceptions in himself. Indeed, as Bacon notes, "a developed sensory apparatus is a prerequisite to effective interpretation."[6] Thus, as instructors, we should initially work to create in our students a sensitivity or a readiness to receive the sensory responses evoked by literary works. The degree to which the literature and its imagery will be effectively performed and transferred is dependent not only on the author's reservoir of experience as pointed out by Lee,[7] but on the interpreter's reservoir of experience as well. Accordingly, the instructor should employ classroom exercises and methods that will enable students to develop their responses to literature.

Only when the interpreter can respond internally to actual external forces will he be able to sustain imaginary awareness for the period of time that a performance in this art form requires. Consequently, a course in oral interpretation needs to be viewed from a double perspective: instructors and practicioners need to realize that interpretation develops people at the same time as it develops readers. The art develops people because it helps to precipitate their self knowledge and to increase their experiential capacties.[8] In Improvisation for the Theatre, Viola Spolin argues for this position when she states that "it is entirely possible that what is called talented behavior is simply a greater individual capacity for experiencing."[9] And as Brian Way finds, fully developed people seldom turn out

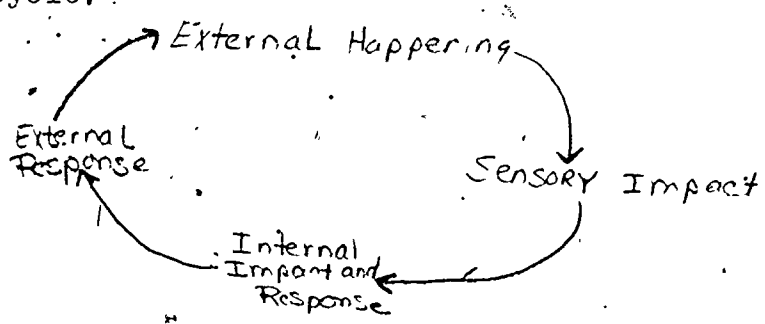
to be uninteresting people.[10] Neither will they turn out to be uninteresting interpreters.

Mind-Sense-Body Cycle

At the outset of his experiences with oral interpretation, the student should be primarily involved with discovering and exploring his own resources. This necessitates work in training the five senses, the physical self, as well as the imagination. In addition, all of these factors are to some extent dependent upon the development of the student's concentration. In other words, the training we foresee for the oral interpreter is somewhat similar to the training Grotowski believed necessary for the actor.[11]

We envision the course operating, in part, as a "scalpel" which will allow the student to open himself, to transcend himself, and then to find the resources hidden within himself. By opening the student to experience the instructor is doing more than equipping the student with skills in the traditional sense; rather, he is also working with the student to eradicate his perceptual blocks. The instructor may use three basic techniques to bring about this development. He may employ kinesiologic approaches, paralinguistic strategies, and sense-memory methods. By using exercises based on the theory of these three fields the instructor will enable the student to harness his physical resources so that they may help him to express literature, and his sensory capacities so that they may help him to experience literature. After engaging in such an exercise program the student may be reborn not only as a proficient interpreter but also as a person.

The following model illustrates the, environment-mind-sense-body cycle.



As demonstrated in the diagram, our program asks the interpreter to develop a condition of aliveness to his environment (External Happening--Sensory Impact), a keen sensory response to this happening (Internal Impact and Response), as well as an awareness of what this specific response causes him to feel and do (External Response). In other words, we are suggesting that the oral interpreter's understanding of all stimuli needs to spring from within; it should be organic.

It is noteworthy that, like the actor, the interpreter's instrument is also his own self--his voice, his body, his will and his imagination.[12] Accordingly, like the actor, the interpreter needs to be able to determine all the problems of his instrument--all of its weaknesses and all of its strengths. Awareness training is advocated with just this purpose in mind. Indeed, if interpretation is "the art of communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional and aesthetic entirety,"[13] then we must first educate the individual to be able to do this. We must aid him in developing his potentials of self.[14] For this reason, external and internal

awareness ought to be trained prior to imaginary awareness. The interpreter needs to be able to draw on each of these qualities when he approaches a selected script.

It should be pointed out that awareness exercises ought to be utilized repeatedly through all phases of an oral interpreter's training. The following statement by Brian Way serves to reinforce this belief: "An analogy might be made with hair and teeth: without constant and continual attention early efforts are negated. Hair and teeth are tangible so there's no problem in seeing clearly the need for constant attention; the five major senses are intangible and yet how much more important they are to the business of living a full, sensitive and rich life."[15] Just as re-reading a good book a number of times over a period of years opens up new vistas and areas for exploration, a return to awareness exercises during various phases of an oral interpreter's training provides numerous developmental opportunities. The senses are the interpreter's avenues to appreciation; he must continually "journey their road."

Conclusion

If the preceding analysis of the oral reader's needs is accurate, then implementing awareness training into his course of study may prove one of the most productive strategies for helping him develop his art. As Lee notes, it is obvious that in performance the interpreter cannot stop after each image to be sure that his audience has had time to see, taste, smell,

touch and hear the literary work's accompanying appeals.[16] The point is that preparatory exercises and conditioning do allow him to do this. Only after the oral interpretation instructor has helped each of his students to establish a solid ground of imaginary experiences for himself should literature enter the picture. Before he is asked to internalize literature, the student must be able to internalize and physicalize sensory experiences from his own life. Through such a progression, the reader will be able to establish a more effective congruence between the metaworld of the literature and his own inner self. It seems, as Coger so aptly states, that if an interpreter is to experience literature, he must approach literature with his whole being.[17] To do this the interpreter must work to develop an alert sensory apparatus and a responsive body. Only then will the interpreter be fully ready to meet his script.

Footnotes

Teri Gamble is Instructor, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, Queens College, City University of New York; Michael Gamble is Instructor, Department of Speech and Theatre, Herbert H. Lehman College, City University of New York. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gamble are Doctoral Candidates in Educational Theatre at New York University.

[1] Alethea Smith Mattingly and Wilma H. Grimes, Interpretation: Writer Reader Audience (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), p.38.

[2] Leland H. Roloff, The Perception and Evocation of Literature (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1973), p.8.

[3] S. Howard Bartley, Principles of Perception (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p.22.

[4] Wallace A. Bacon, The Art of Interpretation (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 136.

[5] Robert M. Post, "Perception Through Performance of Literature," The Speech Teacher, 19 (September 1970), 169.

[6] Bacon, p. 6.

[7] Charlotte Lee, Oral Interpretation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), p. 182.

[8] Mattingly and Grimes, p. 5.

[9] Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p.3.

[10] Brian Way, Development Through Drama (New York: Humanities Press, 1967), p. 21.

[11] Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 57.

[12] Jerome Rockwood, The Craftsmen of Dionysus (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1966), p. 32.

[13] Lee, p. 2.

[14] Sarah E. Sanderson, "Establishing Objectives for a Course in Reading Aloud," The Speech Teacher, 21 (September 1972), 170.

[15] Way, p. 21.

[16] Lee, p. 185.

[17] Leslie Irene Coger, "Physical Actions and the Oral Interpreter," in Studies in Interpretation, ed. Esther M. Doyle and Virginia Hastings Floyd (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi NV, 1972), p. 285.

Abstract

This paper presents a rationale for incorporating awareness training into an oral interpreter's course of study. Two models of the awareness development process are introduced in an effort to explicate the proposed educational strategy.